

UPS workers: Form rank-and-file committees independent of the Teamster bureaucracy to defeat the upcoming sellout, fight for a national strike!

Tom Hall
8 June 2023

UPS workers: Take up the fight for workers' control! Contact the WSWS for help setting up a rank-and-file committee by filling out the form at the end of this article. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

With the strike authorization vote beginning, 340,000 UPS workers must prepare for a showdown against both the logistics giant and the pro-corporate Teamster bureaucracy.

Workers are itching for a fight. They all know what the issues are: income eaten by inflation, poverty wages for warehouse workers, the existence of the second-tier “22.4” delivery position, camera surveillance and lack of air conditioning in the delivery trucks and more. Workers are determined to win back everything that has been taken from them, particularly in 2018, when the Teamster officials rammed through a sellout contract that the majority had voted down.

UPS, which made over \$100 billion in revenue last year, is gearing up for a fight too. Across the country, it is laying off drivers and cutting back shifts in order to intimidate workers. The corporate executives are determined not to give anything back to the workers. They want even more concessions, including on automation and Uber-style “personal vehicle deliveries” (PVDs) to allow the company to compete with Amazon in making the highest profits for its Wall Street shareholders.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers to vote to authorize a strike by the widest possible margin. **But in and of itself, this resolves nothing.** Workers must begin organizing themselves now to take the conduct of the fight out of the hands of the Teamsters apparatus and transfer power and decision-making to rank-and-file workers. Everything depends upon the mobilization of the rank and file, the most powerful social force in this battle, against the bureaucratic straitjacket.

Last summer, members of the BLET train engineers' union, which is also part of the Teamsters, voted by 99.5 percent to authorize a national rail strike. The Teamsters and the BLET defied this mandate and worked for months to try to ram through a sellout, ultimately working with Biden and Congress to enable them to ban a strike and impose the deal. They are fully prepared to do the same thing at UPS.

Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien and General Secretary-Treasurer Fred Zuckerman have been posturing for months, pledging to strike UPS by August 1 if a deal is not in place by then. But that only means that they are determined to get whatever sellout is being cooked up before then. These career bureaucrats—O'Brien was a longtime protégé of previous General President James P. Hoffa and played a key role in the 2013 UPS contract—are being recast as “reformers” with the help of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and the Democratic Socialists of America (whose members voted in Congress last year to ban the national rail strike).

The union officials claim that a “yes” vote will give them a mandate and strengthen their position at the bargaining table. This is a lie because the union bureaucrats, who are joined at the hip with management and the pro-corporate parties in Washington, does not represent workers and are terrified of them. Behind closed doors, they are working to impose a sellout as bad, or even worse, than the current contract.

Here are the facts:

- **The strike vote has been organized at the last minute in order to suppress voter turnout.** By this time in 2018, the strike vote had already been completed, even though the former administration was not even pretending that it might call a work stoppage. Instead of voting packets being sent out to the entire membership, it is being hastily organized local by local. Some workers are being forced to drive hours out of their way to the local hall in narrow time windows over the weekend, guaranteeing that many will not have the chance to vote or even know that the vote is happening.

- **The Teamsters apparatus has already reneged on promises not to begin national contract talks until all supplemental deals have been agreed to.** This shows that the union bureaucrats, perhaps even more than UPS, are under pressure to get a deal worked out before the end of July.

- **The talks are being held behind closed doors, denying workers the ability to see for themselves what is being discussed.** In spite of the evasive social media “updates” and presence of hand-picked “rank-and-file” representatives on the

bargaining committee designed to create the appearance of transparency, the Teamsters signed a non-disclosure agreement at the start of the talks, ensuring that workers are only allowed to hear what they and UPS want them to.

- **What has been released already shows that they have given up concessions to UPS.** In a short 30-minute webinar last Wednesday, O'Brien admitted that they have agreed to allow cameras to remain in delivery trucks under the pretext of "training" purposes. They also have paved the way for new automation and drone technology to be introduced, destroying jobs, with only the fig leaf of requiring union approval. This approval is always given provided the bureaucracy's bread is buttered.

- **The Teamsters has done nothing to alert members about the layoffs and shift cuts taking place nationwide.** The International has not even acknowledged them, even though they have been taking place for months. In one of the few instances of any public response, one local rep at the Worldport hub blandly stated that UPS has the "right" under the contract and the law to change their business model as they see fit. This is a formula for management dictatorship, with union bureaucrats at their side telling workers "they can do that" whenever they complain.

- **The Teamsters bureaucracy is in close talks with the pro-corporate Biden administration to prevent a strike.** Last year, O'Brien visited the White House seven times, including at several key moments during the rail contract crisis. There can be no doubt that they are in similar regular talks with the White House today. Meanwhile, O'Brien has covered for Biden, absurdly claiming at a rally this spring that he did not intercede against the railroaders. The Teamsters even have put their stamp of approval on the budget ceiling deal in Congress, which includes massive cuts to social spending while there are endless bank bailouts and military spending is allowed to spiral out of control.

Rank-and-file committees: The way forward

The most dangerous thing for workers is to have a wait-and-see attitude. If left in the hands of the bureaucracy, there is only one result possible: another sellout. Therefore, what Teamsters members need is to develop new organizations which they control to enable them to fight a two-front war against both the company and the pro-corporate union apparatus.

This is not a "contract campaign" of the type championed by the TDU and the DSA, which means nothing more than throwing workers into "supporting" and "providing leverage" to bureaucrats who are hostile to them and will always be hostile to them. What workers need is a rank-and-file committee to take matters into their own hands, by forming a network of rank-and-file committees at every hub.

The functions of these committees would be: **First**, to pierce the information blackout and provide workers with critical information, including on every violation of their democratic rights by the bureaucracy. **Second**, to provide a forum for democratic

discussion and decision-making outside of the watchful eyes of the Teamsters officials, who function as management stoolpigeons. **Third**, to prepare and implement a strategy and organize actions by the rank and file on a national scale. And **Fourth**, to appeal for the broadest possible support and unity from workers across the entire supply chain, including postal workers, railroad workers, dockworkers, manufacturing workers and logistics workers across the globe.

All of the work of the committees will be directed by the fundamental principle that the will of the rank and file takes absolute priority over everything else. Workers must fight for the idea that they alone, and not the bureaucrats, have the authority to decide the conduct of their own struggle.

Workers in these committees would also decide on a series of non-negotiable demands, beyond which they will not accept any contract. We propose that these include:

- A \$30 per hour starting wage for warehouse workers, with automatic cost-of-living increases;
- An end to the "22.4" drivers and all lower-tier positions. No personal vehicle deliveries;
- An end to all forms of electronic surveillance; and
- Workers' control over safety conditions, including the authority to shut down a facility in a health emergency, such as a COVID-19 outbreak or the recent smoke from the Canadian fires which descended across the Midwest and Northeast.

Rank-and-file committees are being formed all over the world. Last year, railroaders did not wait for the inevitable betrayal but organized to fight it. The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee held informational pickets, issued statements explaining what workers were up against and held public meetings attended by hundreds of their coworkers. This struck fear in the bureaucracy, which reacted furiously against it.

Committees are also being formed in the auto industry, where like the Teamsters, a bogus "reform" slate in the union is in charge of preparing the next round of sellouts at the US automakers this September. Already, workers are organizing to break the isolation imposed by the United Auto Workers on a critical strike by Clarios battery workers near Toledo, Ohio, campaigning in particular to refuse to handle scab batteries in the assembly plants.

Committees are also being formed internationally, including in Britain, where postal workers are organizing against the betrayal of the CWU union, in Australia, Sri Lanka, Germany and other countries. These committees are united in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which allows them to coordinate actions on a world scale against massive transnational corporations.

The time has come for such a committee to be formed at UPS. The *World Socialist Web Site* stands ready to assist. If you agree, contact us today by filling out the form below.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)